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SERMON

Preach'd before the

SOCIETY

FOR

Reformation of Manners;

ON

Easter - Tuesday, at Kingston upon
Thames, 1700.

By *Eleon Harding*, M. A. Vicar of
Kingston upon Thames,

London, Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, at the
Bible and Three Crowns near Mercers-
Chappel in Creepside, 1700. *n*

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TO THE
READER.

AS this Sermon was Prech'd, so now it is Printed, at the Request of a Society of Men, who do not, as far as I have been able to inform my self, behave themselves superciliously, nor invade the Office of the Lord's Anointed, considered either in a Sacred or Civil sense; and who, by consequence, are not possess'd of such Principles, as are apt to hurry others on to Enthusiasm: No, they are Men of peaceable and sober Lives, who seem heartily concern'd at the unbridled violation of the Laws of God, and of the good and wholesom Statutes of their Country; and they wish, I dare say, with all their Souls, that the Zeal of all Magistrates was such, as that they might be excus'd from the Prosecution of Profane and Immoral Men, for their Vices. And if such Men as these shall be accounted enemies to their Neighbour-hood, there's

To the Reader.

no such thing as true friendship in our little World; but the Devil and his Agents may act as they list, till they have made us all ripe for Vengeance. All that I shall say more, before I dismiss Thee, is, that I have endeavoured, in this Discourse, to fortifie these Men (for whose good Success I shall ever Pray) against all those Insinuations, which are design'd to discourage their Proceedings; and to encourage both them and all others that are, or shall hereafter be, engag'd in the same useful Undertakings, to go on with their Work as long as the Day lasteth. And if I have contributed, even in a lesser degree, towards any of these ends, Bless God for it, and reckon me (if thou pleasest) the meanest Servant at His Altar.

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Gideon Harding,

L 7 J 1871

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S E R M O N

P R E A C H E D

Before the Society for Reformation
of Manners, &c.

2 Tim. 2. 8.

Remember that Jesus Christ, of the
Seed of David, was raised from
the Dead.

THE Occasion of these Words,
was this: St. Paul had very
lately Consecrated his belo-
ved *Timothy* a Bishop, and
sent him, as such, to preside over the
Church of *Ephesus*: And foreseeing
what Afflictions and Persecutions he
would there meet with, by a faithful
Discharge of his Pastoral Office; he ve-

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ry prudently fortifies him against them; by re-minding him of Christ's Resurrection; and very properly joins, with that *Memento*, that part of the *Messiah's* History, which declares him to be of the Seed of *David*: For by this, the Apostle inculcates, that it *David* (from whom Christ, according to the flesh, descended) did undergo so many Afflictions by the frequent Persecutions of *Saul*, tho' he had both merited to be his Son-in-Law, and was also actually appointed King over *Israel*, by the expresse Command of God; and that, it Jesus Christ, who was King of Peace and Glory over spiritual *Israel*, did meet with so many Indignities from those his own Country-men, the *Jews*, whom, in the highest Charity, He came to save; Then might *Timothy*, in all reason, patiently endure his expected, rough treatment; as remembring, that *David*, did at last, peaceably enjoy *Saul's* Crown; and that Jesus Christ, after all His Sufferings and Death, did triumphantly Rise from the Dead, and Ascended into Heaven, where He now sits in the Throne of his Glory, *having made His Enemies His Footstool.*

Thus

Thus much being premis'd, touching the occasion of the Words of my Text; before I enter upon the ensuing Discourse, I shall take the liberty to say, That being desir'd to preach to the Society for Reformation of Manners, lately set up in this Town; I thought, I could not fix upon a more seasonable or suitable Subject than the Text will afford. For this being *Easter-week*, The Resurrection of Christ ought not, I concluded, to be pass'd over in silence: And the Text, which re-minds *Timothy* of that Grand Article of our Faith, supposing him in a state of Affliction and Persecution, thro' a vigorous and courageous performance of his Duty; I saw no reason why I might not directly apply the Apostle's Words to you: For, now that you are engag'd, tho' in differing circumstances from *Timothy*, yet in the same commendable Design of beating down the strong-holds of Satan, (the faithful discharge of which, will often expose you to danger and hazard). I see not, as I said before, any reason, why you should not, with *Timothy*, Remember, that Jesus Christ, of the Seed of David

David, was rais'd from the Dead.

In speaking to which Words, I shall do these two things:

I. Shew, that a state of Afflictions and Persecutions is highly consistent with a state of Christianity.

II. Prove, That a frequent Remembrance of, and a serious Meditation upon, the Resurrection of our Blessed Saviour, is the best preservative against the prevalency of Afflictions, and the most effectual Method to prevent our sinking and desponding under their weight.

First, I shall shew, That a state of Afflictions and Persecutions is highly consistent with a state of Christianity.

For the full clearing of which Point, it will be very sufficient, if I can shew, that Christianity, or a faithful Adherence to the Rules of the Gospel, has ever yet been, and, by parity of Reason, will ever be attended with Sufferings. And this will abundantly appear:

1. From the Holy Scriptures.
2. From the Examples of such as have suffered.

3. From

3. From the Reason and Nature of the Thing.

And *First*, The Holy Scriptures of the New Testament assure us, that Christianity will always be attended with Sufferings and Afflictions.

When our Blessed Saviour, *St. Mark* 10. 29, 30. promis'd His Rewards to them that forsook any thing for His sake, and the Gospels; He assures them indeed, that they should receive an Hundred-fold; but that they should not be exempted from Persecutions.

So again; *St. Mark* 13. 9, 13. He tells some of the Apostles plainly, that, if they adher'd to his Doctrine, they should *be delivered up to Councils; be beaten in the Synagogues; be brought before Rulers and Kings; and be hated of all (wicked unchristian) Men.*

The same thing is recorded, tho' in a different Case, yet in almost the same Words, *St. Matth.* 10. 17, 18.

And that Christ might effectually prepare His Disciples to undergo those Persecutions, with Courage, which he knew would befall them, after his Departure; He directs a great part of His dying Discourse

Discourse to them this way, *St. Job.* 14, 15, 16. Chapters, that they should be evry severely dealt with on His Account, and be in almost constant Tribulation. And all along, the Apostolical Epistles, Christians are frequently warn'd to be, upon their guard, against their Enemies Assaults. All which Instances, with many more that might be easily produc'd, do abundantly prove, that the state of Christianity, must be a state of Suffering.

Secondly, This will be farther evidenc'd by the Examples of Christ and His Apostles, as well as of others who have lived since Christ.

A Man cannot but see, (tho' he only takes a cursory view of the Four Gospels) that the whole Life of our Blessed Saviour, from the vile Manger to the Bloody Cross, was one continued Scene of Sufferings and Afflictions.

The things which Men generally most esteem, are nobleness of Birth, Honour, Riches, and a fair Reputation. But which of all these was the portion of our dearest Redeemer?

'Tis true indeed, that the ever Blest
fed

fed Jesus, (according to the flesh) descended from the Royal Line of *David*, both by *Joseph*, His supposed Father, and by *Mary* His true Mother, as *St. Mat.* Chap. 1. and *Luke*, Chap. 3. do attest in their Genealogies: But, besides that, this is not allow'd by the latter Jewish Rabbi's, wherein consisted that Pomp and Splendour that usually appears at the Birth of Princes. We know, 'tis true, that a *Star appear'd to the Wise-men in the East*, (*Mat. 2. 1, 29.*) about the time of Jesus's Birth, by which they were directed to go to *Bethlehem*, to *Worship Him*; and that a Quire of Angels (*Luk. 2. 8, &c.*) proclaim'd Him, to the Shepherds, *A Saviour Christ the Lord*. And one might reasonably have expected, that the whole Jewish Nation should have been ready to accommodate their *Messiah* with every thing, answerable to his Character; but on the direct contrary, not so much as a Lodging room can be procur'd for Him; no, He must be content with a Manger, instead of a Bed or a Cradle; and instead of a good Fire, to nourish His tender Body, and to defend it from cold,

He

He shall feel no other heat, than what is emitted from the breath and dung of Beasts.

Honours, and Riches, and a plentiful Substistence, were but the just due of so welcome a Guest to the World: But instead of these, Christ himself tells us, that He had not so much as a resting place of His own: *The Foxes have holes, and the Birds of the Air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his Head*, St. Matth. 8. 20. And yet as poor and miserable as He was, the Tax-gatherers demanded Tribute of Him at *Capernaum*, for the use of the Temple, and force Him to work a Miracle to pay it, St. Matth. 17. 24, &c. A fair and unspotted Reputation (lastly) Christ might well have expected from his own Country-men, among whom He went continually about, doing good; but instead of more deserv'd Eulogies, they contemptibly call'd Him, the *Carpenter's Son, a Galilean, a Gluttonous Man and a Wine-biber, and a friend of Publicans and Sinners*.

But, besides that bitter portion of hunger and cold, poverty and disgrace, which

which the innocent Son of God shared; what Snares were there laid for His Life? How many Stones were taken up to throw at Him, for only telling the *Jews* necessary and seasonable Truths? What Sorrows and Agonies did He feel in the Garden? What unspeakable Torments (lastly) did He undergo on the Cross?

If these were not Afflictions, I'm certain there is then no such thing as *misery* in humane Nature; and if the Captain of our Salvation suffered so much from a froward and perplexing World, must the Souldiers, listd under Him, expect no Scars in His Quarrel? No, no: His Apostles and Evangelists met with much the same usage, as He met with; for besides that contempt and hatred, those Stripes and Imprisonments they were constantly expos'd to: One was Stoned to death; another was Beheaded; a third was Crucified with his Head downward; some died one Death, others another; and all of 'em (St. *John* only excepted, as the Ecclesiastical Historians relate) were barbarously murdered for adhering to their Master's Doctrine:

Not

Not that *St. John* ended his days in an exemption from Persecutions; for besides that, he was banish'd into *Patmos*, as he says of himself, *Rev. 1. 9. for the Word of God, and for the Testimony of Jesus Christ: Tertullian* vouches, that before his Banishment, he was accus'd to *Domitian*, and, by his Proconsul in *Asia*, sent to *Rome*; where, at the Emperour's Command, he was cast into a Caldron of boyling Oyle; from which, notwithstanding he escap'd, as unhurt, as those Servants of God, who were cast into the Fiery Furnace, *Dan. 3d. Ch.*

Of this, I think, we may be very certain, that only *St. John*, of all the Apostles, had that favour of God (maugre all the Spite of Men and Devils) that he died, without violence in a good Old Age, when he had lived about 72 Years after Christs Ascension into Heaven.

Nor did Persecution find a period with the Death of the Apostles, but rather it might then be said to begin to bear date: For about five Years after *St. John's* peaceable Exit (as if that devilish Spirit of Malice would have an ample Satisfaction, for the escape of one
Apostle

Apostle out of its hands) that truly Apostolical man St. *Ignatius* Bp. of *Antioch*, was condemn'd by the Emperor *Trajan*, to the Lions; and being sent to *Rome*, was there torn to pieces by Brutes, less Savage than the Spectatours, in the *Amphitheatre*.

And that very venerable Mar, St. *Polycarp*, Bp. of *Smyrna*, was condemned to the Flames; to such Flames (I speak it by the Testimony of Eye-witnesses) as rather fought to guard, than to consume his Body; insomuch that the Executioner was forc'd to dispatch him with his Sword, when but half burned.

To these two I might add *Justin-Martyr*, *Origen*, and St. *Cyprian* Bp. of *Carthage*, who all were put to Death for the Cause of Christ: Nay, I might fill A Sermon, with a bare recital of the single Sufferings of the great *Athanasius*, Bp. of *Alexandria*; only because he would not strike Sail to the *Arians*, and betray the Catholick-Faith; but that I intend not a Martyrology. What then shall I say more? The time would

fail me to give you but a short Abstract of the frequent Banishments, the strange Tortures, and the various Deaths, that were inflicted, not on the Fathers of the Church only, but on Thousands of private Christians, during Ten bloody Persecutions.

Thus much only, I shall here add, that what the Author to the Hebrews says of the Patriarchs, Judges of *Israel*, and of the Prophets, *Heb. 11. 35, &c.* was literally true of the primitive Christian Martyrs; *They were tortured; not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better Resurrection. And others had trials of cruel Mockings and Scourgings, yea, moreover, of Bonds and Imprisonment. They were Stoned, they were Sawn asunder, were Tempted, were slain with the Sword; they wandered about in Sheepskins, and Goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in Deserts, and in Mountains, and in Dens and Caves of the Earth.*

All this they contentedly endur'd, for the sake of their most excellent Religion, and for that warrantable Zeal
which

which they shew'd, in asserting and holding fast the Heavenly Doctrine of God their Saviour.

By this time, I suppose, I have produc'd Examples enough to shew, that Afflictions are to be expected in a zealous Profession, and earnest Practice of Christianity. I proceed now (*Thirdly*) to clear this Point yet further, by shewing the Reason and Nature of the thing it self.

The Religion of a Christian is establish'd upon Principles, that are very contrary to the corrupted Inclinations of Mankind: Men sometimes feel in themselves such impetuous Desires after sensual Enjoyments, and Nature eggs 'em on so fast to a compliance with its Dictates, that they no sooner yield, than they're tempted to think that, That Religion had not God for its Author, which so directly gainsays their Passions, and denies 'em the fruition of their strongest Longings.

Hence is it, that a Man cannot venture to reprove Men for their Vices, or, with the most friend-like Essays, endeavour to convince 'em of their Mis-

takes; but immediatly he'll find an Insurrection of their malignant Spirits, and a strange Alteration in their very looks; and though they may then play the Sy-cophant so far, as to thank him for his kindness; yet they shall, it may be ever after, greedily catch at every opportunity of venting their rancor and hatred, by a studious misrepresentation of all that he says or does; and the highest pitch of their Charity shall be found to center in his continual Defamation. Every serious and considering Christian must needs attest this Truth on a too frequent Experience; and both Sacred and Church-Histories, furnish us with too many instances of the same Nature.

St. *John Baptist* might have kept his head on his shoulders, if he would but have let *Herod* alone, and not have reprov'd him for his Incest; so likewise might the Apostles have died in their Beds, if they could have sat down contented, to see Judaism rampant, and the Worship of Idols prevalent: But no sooner do they pursue their truest Interest, in a faithful Execution of
their

their Commission, than they are persecuted for it, by Stripes, Stonings, Imprisonments, and Death

And from the Transactions of those several Occurrences, in all Ages of Christianity, down to this present time; we may reasonably conclude, that the same game is to be play'd to the World's end: For the Reason of the Thing continuing for ever the same; and the Opposition that impious wretches will always make to Lectures and Examples of Piety and Vertue, standing upon one bottom; we may certainly infer, without a Spirit of Prophecy, that as the state of Christianity has ever been, and in our Age is, a state of Afflictions; so that it will never cease to be so, till time is swallowed up by Eternity.

Having thus at large prov'd :

1. From express Texts of Scripture.
2. From many Examples of persecuted Christians.
3. From the Reason and Nature of the Thing.

I. That a state of Afflictions is very consistent with a zealous and vigorous discharge of the Duties of Christianity.

II. I proceed now to my 2^d. General Head, which was to shew, That a frequent Remembrance of, and a serious Meditation upon the Resurrection of our Blessed Saviour, is the best Preservative against the prevalency of those Afflictions, that are entail'd upon a Christian state.

I need not be tedious in an Argument of this nature, after St. Paul himself has press'd it home in the Words of my Text.

I shall therefore only inforce the Apostle's *Memorandum*, by these Two Observations following. And

First, We may observe, that Men are generally so devoted to this World, and their Souls are so strongly bent towards sensible Objects, that, so long especially as their Sails are crowded with a prosperous Gale, they very rarely will afford one thought to the things that may or shall hereafter happen. The present time is what they are

are for, and they thence resolve, as they falsely estimate things, to lose none of it; but with the blind Watchmen, whom the Prophet inveigheth against, *Isa.* 56. 12. they solace themselves; Come ye, say they, I will fetch Wine, and we will fill our selves with Strong drink, and to Morrow shall be as this Day, and much more abundant.

But now, if God shall please to send a slight Affliction upon these Men; there's an immediate damp upon their Spirits, they're quite at their wits end; and they complain as much, at a little Head-ach, as if they were losing their Limbs or their Lives: The Reason is manifest; they don't think of Afflictions till they feel their weight; and then, having made no provision against the Evil Day, by a regular Devotion and Meditation, they fret, they murmur and repine, and are still at a loss, how to be easy under the load that oppresseth them.

Whereas, on the contrary, if Men would but allow one Hour in a Day for thinking, and spend that very little part of their Youth and Health in a se-

rious Reflection upon those many Evils and Disappointments, which the most Righteous and Innocent Son of God met with; what a scanty portion of worldly goods He enjoyed; what Hardships He encountred; and what Severities He was, all His Life, expos'd to: But that after all His Sufferings, even unto Death, He gloriously arose from the Prison of the Grave, after Three Days Burial, and Triumphantly Ascended into Heaven, and Sate on the Right Hand of God: If, I say, Men would often and seriously meditate on these things; this would most effectually quell their peevish and impatient Desires after the good Things of this Life; this would teach 'em to know themselves to be but Men; this, lastly, would both prepare 'em for Sufferings, and make 'em contentedly undergo a few momentary Afflictions, that so they might at last partake of the same joyful Resurrection to eternal Pleasures and Delights, of which their great Fore-runner and Author of their Faith, has already been partaker.

Secondly,

Secondly, We may observe; That not only disappointments, crosses and losses, in things relating to the Body, but even Afflictions of an higher nature, such as are peculiar to the Mind of Man, would sit more easy, by frequently remembering, that *Jesus Christ, of the Seed of David, was raised from the Dead.*

How angry and churlish do some Men grow, when they fail of that respect, which they think to be their due? A Rich Man, with a proud Heart and towering Thoughts, believes, that every one affronts him, that does not pay him all the reverence, which is claim'd only by the Nobility, &c. it may be, by Princes of the Blood Royal: Nay, even a Man in narrow circumstances, who has made it his great care to do his Duty to God and to his Neighbour, thinks it no small hardship to be expos'd to want and distress; he is inclin'd to think that Divine providence neglects him, and, possibly, is tempted to forsake, or to grow more remiss in, his Christian Duty; by his best discharge of which, he meets with oppression, instead of encouragement; and

and instead of the love, he gains only the ill-will and hatred of his Neighbours.

In both these Instances, to which most other Cases may be easily reduc'd: The best method for the afflicted Man to take, will be to consider the exemplary Humility, Patience, and Resignation of Mind, which appear'd so eminently in Christ our Head: Our ever Blessed Redeemer was infinitely more innocent and inoffensive, than the best of Men either now are, or ever were; and yet, nothing but calamity and affliction, contempt and scorn, disgrace and calumny were the Rewards of His Goodness and Charity: And if He, who was Lord and King of both Worlds, was willing, for our sakes, to endure all this, without one Murmuring word or Repining thought; shall we, that are sinful dust and ashes, complain and rail, and be at our wits end, merely because we suffer some petty, short-liv'd evils? Better will it become us all, in prudence, to *hold fast the profession of our Faith, without wavering*, and patiently and submissively to demean our selves, under all the calamities of mind

mind that shall befall us: For if we do this willingly, we have our reward; we shall find such a calmness, sedateness, and composure in our Breasts, as Words cannot aptly describe; and we shall hereafter be carried up to Heaven, where we shall be fill'd with such wonder and joy, as are only competent with our then enlarg'd faculties, and be compleatly blessed in those Mansions of our God, which Jesus Christ, by His Death, has purchas'd, and is now going to prepare, for all His faithful and obedient Servants.

THe Inference, from what has been said in this Discourse, is, in general, This; That no person ought to forbear a vigorous prosecution of his Duty, upon the score of that calumny and disgrace; that malice and hatred, those afflictions and persecutions, that the profligate and wicked are always ready to load him with. I have before suggested, that the whole Host of Christian Martyrs might have liv'd and died in peace, (in the peace of this World, I mean, for I doubt not but that

that in their Lives they had daily inward Peace of Mind, and in their Death Comfort) if they would have been, as some in those early Days, and others both in Queen *Mary's*, and in a later Reign, were, *Proditores*, and have tamely delivered up their Bibles to be burn'd, and cowardly forsaken the Religion of the Gospel: But contrariwise, they considered themselves, as Souldiers and Voluntiers, list'd and engag'd to fight under the Banner of Christ; they remembred, at once, His Sufferings, and His Victory, in the end; they daily saw their Bishops and Pastors suffer Martyrdom with an inflexible Courage and Constancy, and, by their brave Example, were animated to endure the loss of all things, rather than draw back unto Perdition.

And, Oh that we, who are as Firebrands pluck'd out of the Fire, and have not many Years since escap'd, by a wonderful Deliverance, could be influenc'd, by the Carriage of such Christian Héroes, to seek for true Peace with God, and with our own Consciences!

But

But how shall this Peace be obtain'd? Be not startled at what I say; This Peace cannot, humanely speaking, be found; but in a continual warfare with the Devil, the World, and the Flesh; in a perpetual resistance of all Temptations; and in a constant abstinence from all worldly and carnal Lusts: These are those our deadly and implacable Enemies, which, if we use not our whole stock of Grace and Industry to destroy, will never leave the Field, till they have left us none remaining, and have carried away both us and our standards to Hell.

But if we be careful, as it infinitely concerns us to be, to steer our Lives by the Compass of God's Law; if we courageously set upon, and go through with, the works of Righteousness, and true Holiness; and if we will be persuaded to exercise such a Zeal for the Honour of God, and for the depress'd Cause of Religion and Virtue, as has Christian Prudence and Knowledge for its inseparable Associates; we may reasonably expect an happy Voyage to
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the Haven of Rest and Peace.

And what if it should happen, that the frowns of the Wicked, that the utmost rage and fury of Men and Devils, should constantly attend and pursue us, in this our Conflict? Shall these things move us to leave labouring in our Master's Vineyard? Heaven avert such sloth and cowardice! Can we forget, that, *by the help of our God, we shall be able to leap over all these Walls?* Or can we imagin, that if we do our parts manfully, the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ will be wanting to enable us to keep our Ground?

Only, amidst all the trials and temptations we lie under, let us often and earnestly seek, in prayer, for God's Assistance and Direction; and frequently remember, that *Jesus Christ of the Seed of David, was raised from the Dead*; and let this single Consideration inspire us with patience and fortitude in our extreamest Sufferings: And then we shall not fail of that Crown of Glory which Jesus, our Lord and our God, has in store for all His Victorious

torious Souldiers and Servants; which He bought for us, with the price of His own most precious Blood; Which He has assur'd us of, by His Resurrection from Death and the Grave; and which He Ascended up into Heaven, to put on our Heads with His own Hands.

If these comfortable Promises are not true and just, and certainly to be relied on; I do not only say, that Christians are, *of all Men most miserable*; but then also, I say, that the Sacred Scripture is (as it has been often phras'd by some inconsiderate Men among us of unsound and Heterodox Principles) *an insignificant and dead Letter*; and then, by necessary consequence, both *our Preaching is vain, and your Faith is vain.*

Thus much I thought fit to offer, in the general, by way of Application to all People, as being that, in which every Christian living is concerned.

But I have other, and more particular things to say of, and to you, for
whose

whose sakes, more especially, this Discourse was made, not more through your earnest solicitation, than a chearful compliance on my part.

You have declar'd your selves sensible of the dishonour done to God, by the open profaneness of many dissolute and lewd Persons, professing Christianity; which indeed is so great, that I cannot but wonder, that some, otherwise discerning, People, should not be able to see, that we hasten, what we can, to make our selves and the Nation too, ripe for destruction: I wish, I might say truly, that these short-sighted Folks, did not wink hard, and affect blindness.

It cannot be denied, that we have many good Laws, now in force, against Immorality and Profaneness; and such, as, if duly and impartially executed, would force all open Vice especially, to pull in its horns: But on the other hand, it cannot, and therefore ought not, to be dissembled, that the supineness and remissness of those Persons, which should put these wholsom Statutes

Statutes in execution, and make 'em living Laws, is shameful and abominable: This is the repeated Language of our Parliament, in their Addresses; and of our King, in his Proclamations; and these were the Thoughts, and in the Orders, of our late most Gracious Queen, of blessed Memory, who first encourag'd, and promis'd to protect the Societies for *Reformation of Manners*; and with so good and honourable Company, I trust, I shall never have cause to repent, that I have opened my Mouth so wide.

It is pretended, we all know, by Magistrates in general, that they can only punish such as offend in their sight and hearing: But do Adulterers and Adulteresses (whose Eyes wait for the twi-light, that no Eye may see them) use to act their various Scenes of Lewdness before the Magistrate's Face? Or do they, that impudently and profanely accustom themselves to Cursing and Swearing, affect to belch out their horrid Oaths and

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Impre-

Imprecations, in the presence or hearing of the Magistrate? No, these things they care not to do: For tho' they fear not God, yet they regard Man, when their Interest lies at stake, and either their Purfes, or their Bodies, must satisfie the Sanction of that Law, which they transgress. Or lastly, is it for the Honour either of our Laws or of our Law-givers, that the common Swearer, or the Drunkard, or the incestuous Person, or the Whore and her Master, should be indulg'd and conniv'd at? Or that Stews and obscene Houses should be openly tolerated by the State, as it is practis'd at *Rome*, at *Venice*, and at *Amsterdam*? If not: Why shall he be thought a busy and forward fellow, and why shall he be stigmatiz'd with hard Names, that will not suffer all these Sins upon his Brother? Or why shall the Magistrate frown upon, and not rather encourage, all that in him lies, the Person that informs him against all these Offenders?

But it may be objected, that in Cities

ties and Corporations, there are many Officers, whose proper business it is, and whose Oaths oblige them, to search after, and to bring to punishment, all that violate the Laws of the Land, or the particular and By-laws of such respective Jurisdictions; and therefore that such Societies of Men, as are now on foot, being for the most part, Inhabitants of such Cities and Incorporated Villages, are not at all necessary.

But what if such places abound with Officers? What tho' these Officers are bound by the sacred Obligation of an Oath, to look diligently after, and impartially to present all Offences, without favour or affection, hatred or ill-will? All this is but a more solemn piece of pageantry; when neither their Obligations to God, nor to their Neighbour, can prevail to make 'em do their Duty.

The safety, and flourishing state of every Common-wealth; depend almost altogether upon the virtue of its com-

ponent individuals: But if we may guess at the health and soundness of a Body, by the ill Symptoms we see in many of its Members; I am sure, that we have very great reason to apprehend that our state is much shattered, and near to a total dissolution.

So that, let it but be granted (and I know not how it can be denied) that Vice ought to be discountenanc'd and suppress'd; and let it but be own'd (for I'm sure 'tis a great truth) that neither of these are done, as they both ought to be, and might be done; and then, I am bold to say it, I plead both for the honour of God, and for the good of the Common-wealth, in making the best way I can, for the encouragement and protection of such a Society, as have undertaken to do their utmost, towards the pulling down the strong holds of Sin and Satan.

Hitherto, I have endeavoured only to shew the usefulness of such a Society, as many here present have form'd them-

themselves into; and which is therefore necessary, if for no other Reason, yet for that mutual Encouragement, which is thereby given to Men of courage, to shew themselves. 'Tis in this case, as it is in the defence of a Town, or of one's Country; The hands of one Man, or of but a few Men, are not sufficient to guard the Breach, or to repel the Enemy: I need not, I hope, shew the justness of the Allusion; for the Case is too too obvious to every one's Experience.

Let me, now, then intreat the Magistrates of this antient Corporation, and all other Men of influence, to look with a favourable Aspect on the Society, here lately set up; not to be jealous at the Undertaking, as if (what has been said by some unthinking Men) the Game of *Forty One* was to be play'd over again; but to believe it, as really it is in it self, and by the prudent management of its Members, it may prove, a very useful and excellent thing.

This Society, I am glad to see it, has already had a good effect in this place; I do not hear frequent Swearing in the Streets, as, I too often, have heard, before the Society was form'd: Let God be prais'd for these Gleanings; He will, in His own good time, give us, I doubt not, a plentiful Harvest; In the mean time, to you, that are engag'd in so good a Design, I speak it, from the Apostle, *Gal. 6. 9. be ye not weary in well-doing; for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not.*

And in order to this very desirable Blessing, let my Advice take place with you. Labour for a Reformation of other Men's Manners, by first reforming and amending your own: Remember that Character of an Hypocrite, which Christ himself has given, *St. Matth. 7. 3. who officiously offers to pull out the mote, out of his Brother's Eye; but all the while forgets, that a beam is in his own Eye.* You know how to apply this passage; and, I hope, you will so effectually, that I need not do it. Let

Let Courage and Conduct, let Zeal and Prudence go hand in hand, and be never separated from any of your Undertakings. But here arises a difficulty, which has been propos'd to me; and that is, whether you ought to distinguish between an habitual, customary, and confirm'd Sinner; and him that, it may be, is for the first time a transgressor? For my part, to speak freely, I think the distinction absolutely necessary, and in the highest reason, warrantable: For if you can reclaim the latter, at a proper season, by a gentle rebuke, and private admonition; I'm sure, that you'll do him more good, and, by consequence, discharge your own duty better, than if you made his offence more publick, by an information to the Magistrate. Not that I would be thought to advise partially; for surely this method may have a much softer term, and be rather call'd a higher and more endearing Charity; and as such only, I recommend it to you.

Let no Man's wickedness, how great

C 4 soever,

soever, no, not his rude and ill language, nor yet the worst of his defamations, tempt you to hate his Person, or but to wish him harm; but rather shew your selves indeed good Men, in the practice of those Commands, which are solely Christian, *St. Matth. 5. 44, &c. by loving your enemies; by blessing them that curse you; by doing good to them that hate you; and by praying for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you.* Spend much of your time in Prayer to God, to inspire you with a truly Christian Zeal, for His Glory, and your Neighbour's good: And because you will find, that the World will hate you, and that the more good you do, the more will aspersions pursue you; Arm your selves with stedfast Resolution and Prayer, to bear all these slight Skirmishes with fortitude and magnanimity.

Be not disheartned at the disappointments you may meet with, either through the want of Courage and Sincerity in some of your own Members,
or

or by the little ground you can, at first, gain; He that is desirous of being an instrument of suppressing rampant Vices, must be content to weed them up one by one: *Be ye then strong in the Lord, and in the power of his Might.* Ye have taken upon you to plead and defend the Cause of GOD, and of Vertue, which is now grown very much out of Fashion; you ought therefore to learn to despise the little, mean, ill-will of Man, when especially you cannot win his favour, but by losing your God, and your inward Peace.

And the more to strengthen your hands in this useful Undertaking; call to mind your Baptismal Vow; by which you stand oblig'd to Renounce the Devil, and all his Works; the Poms and Vanities of this wicked World, and all the sinful Lusts of the Flesh. For my part, I do not see, that you have ingaged your selves any thing beyond this, in becoming Members of your respective Society.

Reflect

Reflect often on that Admonition which Christ gave to his Apostles, *St. Matth. 10. 32, 33. Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven.*

But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven.

And fear not them which kill the Body, ('tis Christ's own Advice in the same chapter, and on much the same occasion, that I am now Preaching on) *but are not able to kill the Soul, &c.* nor let your Hearts fail you in this warfare; for though the Opposition that you'll meet with, be strong; yet for your comfort; *St. John* has assur'd you, *1 John 4. 4. that greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World.*

What remains, is, only that I discharge my duty to you, by recommending You, and your Undertaking, to the Throne of Grace; which I often, and heartily shall; and now do, in
St.

St. Paul's words, 1 Thes. 5. 23. *The very God of peace Sanctifie you wholly: And I pray God, your whole Spirit, and Soul, and Body, be preserv'd blameless unto the coming of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.*

To whom, &c. be all Glory, Honour, and Adoration, both now and ever. *Amen.*



F I N I S.

